

# **PJOTR ARSHINOV**



## **THE TWO OCTOBERS**

**+ REVIEW OF HISTORY OF THE  
MAKHOVIST MOVEMENT**



**PRINCIPLES, PROPOSITIONS &  
DISCUSSIONS  
FOR LAND & FREEDOM**

An introductory word to the 'anarchivé'  
"Anarchy is Order!"

*I must Create a System or be enslav'd by  
another Man's.  
I will not Reason & Compare: my business  
is to Create'*  
(William Blake)

During the 19th century, anarchism has developed as a result of a social current which aims for freedom and happiness. A number of factors since World War I have made this movement, and its ideas, disappear little by little under the dust of history.

After the classical anarchism - of which the Spanish Revolution was one of the last representatives-a 'new' kind of resistance was founded in the sixties which claimed to be based (at least partly) on this anarchism. However this resistance is often limited to a few (and even then partly misunderstood) slogans such as 'Anarchy is order', 'Property is theft',...

Information about anarchism is often hard to come by, monopolised and intellectual; and therefore visibly disappearing. The 'anarchivé' or 'anarchist archive' Anarchy is Order ( in short **A.O**) is an attempt to make the '**principles, propositions and discussions**' of this tradition available again for anyone it concerns. We believe that these texts are part of our own heritage. They don't belong to publishers, institutes or specialists.

These texts thus have to be available for all anarchists and other people interested. That is one of the conditions to give anarchism a new

impulse, to let the 'new anarchism' outgrow the slogans. This is what makes this project relevant for us: we must find our roots to be able to renew ourselves. We have to learn from the mistakes of our socialist past. History has shown that a large number of the anarchist ideas remain standing, even during the most recent social-economic developments.

**'Anarchy Is Order' does not make profits, everything is spread at the price of printing- and papercosts. This of course creates some limitations for these archives. Everyone is invited to spread along the information we give . This can be done by copying our leaflets, printing from the CD that is available or copying it, e-mailing the texts ,...Become your own anarchiv!!!**

(Be aware though of copyright restrictions. We also want to make sure that the anarchist or non-commercial printers, publishers and authors are not being harmed. Our priority on the other hand remains to spread the ideas, not the ownership of them.)

The anarchiv offers these texts hoping that values like **freedom, solidarity and direct action** get a new meaning and will be lived again; so that the struggle continues against the

*'demons of flesh and blood, that sway scepters  
down here;  
and the dirty microbes that send us dark  
diseases and wish to  
squash us like horseflies;  
and the will-'o-the-wisp of the saddest  
ignorance'.  
(L-P. Boon)*

The rest depends as much on you as it depends on us. Don't mourn, Organise!

Comments, questions, criticism, cooperation can be send to

[A.O@advalvas.be](mailto:A.O@advalvas.be)

A complete list and updates are available on this address, new texts are always

**welcome!!**

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# **THE TWO OCTOBERS**

(1927)

**PIOTR ARCHINOV**

**The** victorious revolution of the workers and peasants in 1917 was legally established in the Bolshevik calendar as the October Revolution. There is sane truth in this, but it is not entirely exact. In October 1917 the workers and peasants of Russia surmounted a colossal obstacle to the development of their Revolution. They abolished the nominal power of the capitalist class, but even before that they achieved something of equal revolutionary importance and perhaps even more fundamental. By taking the economic power from the capitalist class, and the land from the large owners in the countryside, they achieved the right to free and uncontrolled work in the towns, if not the total control of the factories. Consequently, it was well before October that the revolutionary workers destroyed the base of capitalism. All that was left was the superstructure. If there had not been this general expropriation of the capitalists by the workers, the destruction of the bourgeois state machine - the political revolution - would not have succeeded in any way. The resistance of the owners would have been much stronger. On the other hand, the objectives of the social revolution in October were not limited to the overthrow of capitalist power. A long period of practical development

in social self-management was before the workers, but it was to fail in the following years.

Therefore, in considering the evolution of the Russian socialist Revolution as a whole, October appears only as a stage - a powerful and decisive stage, it is true. That is why October does not by itself represent the whole social revolution. In thinking of the victorious October days, one must consider that historical circumstance as determined by the Russian social revolution.

Another no less important peculiarity is that October has two meanings - that which the working' masses who participated in the social revolution gave it, and with them the Anarchist-Communists, and that which was given it by the political party that captured power from this aspiration to social revolution, and which betrayed and stifled all further development. An enormous gulf exists between these two interpretations of October. The October of the workers and peasants is the suppression of the power of the parasite classes in the name of equality and self-management. The Bolshevik October is the conquest of power by the party of the revolutionary intelligentsia, the installation of its 'State Socialism' and of its 'socialist' methods of governing the masses.

## THE WORKERS OCTOBER

The February Revolution caught the different revolutionary parties in complete disarray and without any doubt they were considerably surprised by the profound social character of the dawning revolution. At first, no one except the anarchists wanted to believe it. The Bolshevik Party, which made out it always expressed the most radical aspirations of the working-class, could not go beyond the limits of the bourgeois revolution in its aims. It was only at the April conference that they asked themselves what was really happening in Russia. Was it only the overthrow of Tsarism. or was the revolution going further - as far as the. overthrow of capitalism? This last eventually posed to the Bolsheviks the question of what tactics to employ. Lenin became conscious before the other Bolsheviks of the social character of the revolution, and emphasised the necessity of seizing power. He saw a decisive advance in the workers' and peasants' movement which was undermining the industrial and rural bourgeoisie foundations more and more. A unanimous agreement on these questions could not be reached even up to the October days. The Party manoeuvred all this time in between the social slogans of the masses and the conception of a social-democratic revolution, from where they were created and developed. Not opposing the slogan of petit- and grand-bourgeoisie for a Constituent Assembly, the Party did its best to control the masses,



striving to keep up with their ever-increasing pace.

During this time, the workers marched impetuously forward, relentlessly running their enemies of left and right into the ground. The big rural landowners began everywhere to evacuate the countryside, fleeing from the insurgent peasantry and seeking protection for their possessions and their persons in the towns. Meanwhile, the peasantry proceeded to a direct re-distribution of land, and did not want to hear of peaceful co-existence with the landlords. In the towns as well a sudden change took place between the workers and the owners of enterprises. Thanks to the efforts of the collective genius of the masses, workers' committees sprang up in every industry, intervening directly in production, putting aside the admonishments of the owners and concentrating on eliminating them from production. Thus in different parts of the country, the workers got down to the socialisation of industry.

Simultaneously, all of revolutionary Russia was covered with a vast network of workers' and peasant soviets, which began to function as organs of self management. They developed, prolonged, and defended the Revolution. Capitalist rule and order still existed nominally in the country, but a vast system of social and economic workers' self-management was being created alongside it. This regime of soviets and factory committees, by the very fact of its

appearance, menaced the state system with death . It must be made clear that the birth and development of the soviets and factory committees had nothing do with authoritarian principles. On the contrary, they were in the full sense of the term organs of social and economic self-management of the masses, and in no case the organs of state power. They were opposed to the state machine which sought to direct the masses, and they prepared for a decisive battle against it. "The factories to the workers, the land to the peasants" - these were the slogans by which the revolutionary masses of town and country participated in the defeat of the State machine of the possessing classes in the name of a new social system which was founded on the basic cells of the factory committees and the economic and social soviets. These catch-words circulated from one end of workers' Russia to the other, deeply affecting the direct action against the socialist-bourgeois coalition government.

As was explained above, the workers and peasants had already worked towards the entire reconstruction of the industrial and agrarian system of Russia before October 1917. The agrarian question was virtually solved by the poor peasants as early as June - September 1917. The urban workers, for their part, put into operation organs of social and economic Self-management, having seized from the State and the owners the organisational functions of production. The

October Revolution of the workers overthrew the last and the greatest obstacle to their revolution the state power of the owning classes, already defeated and disorganised. This last evolution opened a vast horizon for the achievement of the social revolution putting it onto the creative road to socialist reconstruction of society, already pointed at by the workers in the preceding months. That is the October of the workers and the peasants. It meant a powerful attempt by the exploited manual workers to destroy totally the foundations of capitalist society, and to build a workers' society based on the principles of equality, independence, and self-management by the proletariat of the towns and the countryside. This October did not reach its natural conclusion. It was violently interrupted by the October of the Bolsheviks, who progressively extended their dictatorship throughout the country.

### THE BOLSHEVIK OCTOBER

All the statist parties, including the Bolsheviks, limited the boundaries of the Russian Revolution to the installation of a social-democratic regime. It was only when the workers and peasants of all Russia began to shake the agraro-bourgeois order, when the social revolution was proved to be an irreversible historical fact, that the Bolsheviks began discussing the social character of the Revolution, and the consequent necessity of

modifying its tactics. There was no unanimity in the Party on questions of the character and orientation of the events which had taken place, even up to October. Furthermore, the October Revolution as well as the events which followed developed while the Central Committee of the Party was divided into two tendencies. Whilst a part of the Central Committee, Lenin at its head, foresaw the inevitable social revolution and proposed preparation for the seizure of power, the other tendency, led by Zinoviev and Kamenev, denounced as adventurist the attempt at social revolution, and went no further than calling for a Constituent Assembly in which the Bolsheviks occupied the seats furthest to the Left. Lenin's point of view prevailed, and the Party began to mobilise its forces in case of a decisive struggle by the masses against the Provisional Government.

The party threw itself into infiltrating the factory committees and the soviets of workers' deputies, doing its best to obtain in these organs of self-management the most mandates possible in order to control their actions. Nevertheless, the Bolshevik conception of, and approach to, the soviets and the factory committees was fundamentally different from that of the masses. While the mass of workers considered them to be the organs of social and economic self-management, the Bolshevik Party looked on them as a means by which it was possible to snatch the power of the sinking bourgeoisie and afterwards to use this

power to serve the interests of the Party. Thus an enormous difference was revealed between the revolutionary masses and the Bolshevik Party in their conceptions and perspectives of October. In the first case, it was the question of the defeat of power with the view of reinforcing and enlarging the already constituted organs of workers and peasants self-management. In the second case, it was the question of leaning on these organs in order to seize power and to subordinate all the revolutionary forces to the Party. This divergence played a fatal role in determining the future course of the Russian Revolution.

The success of the Bolsheviks in the October Revolution - that is to say, the fact that they found themselves in power and from there subordinated the whole Revolution to their Party is explained by their ability to substitute the idea of a Soviet power for the social revolution and the social emancipation of the masses. A priori, these two ideas appear as non-contradictory for it was possible to understand Soviet power as the power of the soviets, and this facilitated the substitution of the idea of Soviet power for that of the Revolution. Nevertheless, in their realisation and consequences these ideas were in violent contraction to each other. The conception of Soviet Power incarnated in the Bolshevik state, was transformed into an entirely traditional bourgeois power concentrated in a handful of individuals who subjected to their authority all that was fundamental and most powerful in

the life of the people - in this particular case, the social revolution. Therefore, with the help of the "power of the soviets" - in which the Bolsheviks monopolised most of the posts - they effectively attained a total power and could proclaim their dictatorship throughout the revolutionary territory. This furnished them with the possibility of strangling all the revolutionary currents of the workers in disagreement with their doctrine of altering the whole course of the Russian Revolution and of making it adopt a multitude of measures contrary to its essence. One of these measures was the militarisation of labour during the years of War Communism - militarisation of the workers so that millions of swindlers and parasites could live in peace, luxury and idleness. Another measure was the war between town and country, provoked by the policy of the Party in considering peasants as elements unreliable and foreign to the Revolution. There was, finally, the strangling of libertarian thought and of the Anarchist movement whose social ideas and catchwords were the force of the Russian Revolution and orientated towards a social revolution. Other measures consisted of the proscription of the independent workers movement, the smothering of the freedom of speech of workers in general. All was reduced to a single centre, from where all instructions emanated concerning the way of life, of thought, of action of the working masses.

That is the October of the Bolsheviks. In it was incarnated the ideal followed by decades by the revolutionary intelligentsia, initially realised now by the wholesale dictatorship of the All-Russian Communist Party. This ideal satisfies the ruling intelligentsia, despite the catastrophic consequences for the workers; now they can celebrate with pomp the anniversary of ten years of power.

### THE ANARCHISTS

Revolutionary Anarchism was the only politico social-current to extol the idea of a social revolution by the workers and peasants, as much during the 1905 Revolution as from the first days of the October Revolution. In fact, the role they could have played would have been colossal, and so could have been the means of struggle employed by the masses themselves. Likewise, no politico-social theory could have blended so harmoniously with the spirit and orientation of the Revolution. The interventions of the Anarchist orators in 1917 were listened to with a rare trust and attention by the workers. One could have said that the revolutionary potential of the workers and peasants, together with the ideological and tactical power of Anarchism could have represented a force to which nothing could be opposed. Unhappily, this fusion did not take place. Some isolated anarchists occasionally led intense revolutionary activity among the workers, but there was not an Anarchist

organisation of great size to lead more continuous and co-ordinated actions, (outside of the Nabat Confederation and the Makhnovchtina in the Ukraine). Only such an organisation could have united the Anarchists and the millions of workers. During such an important and advantageous revolutionary period, the Anarchists limited themselves to the restricted activities of small groups instead of orientating themselves to mass political action. They preferred to drown themselves in the sea of their internal quarrels, not attempting to pose the problem of a common policy and tactic of Anarchism. By this deficiency, they condemned themselves to inaction and sterility during the most important moments of the Revolution.

The causes of this catastrophic state of the Anarchist movement resided in the dispersion, the disorganisation and the absence of a collective tactic - things which have nearly always been raised as principles among Anarchists, preventing them making a single organisational step so that they could orientate the social revolution in a decisive fashion. There is no actual advantage in denouncing those who, by their demagoguery, their thoughtlessness, and their irresponsibility, contributed to create this situation. But the tragic experience: which led the working masses to defeat, and Anarchism to the edge of the abyss, should be assimilated as from now. We must combat and pitilessly stigmatise those who in one way or another,



continue to perpetuate the chaos and confusion in Anarchism, all those who obstruct its re-establishment or organisation. In other words, those whose actions go against those efforts of the movement for the emancipation of labour and the realisation of the Anarchist-Communist society. The working masses appreciate and are instinctively attracted by Anarchism, but will not work with the Anarchist movement until they are convinced of its theoretical and organisational coherence. It is necessary for everyone of us to try to the maximum to attain this coherence.

## CONCLUSIONS AND PERSPECTIVES

The Bolshevik practice of the last ten years shows clearly the counter-revolutionary [role] of their dictatorship of the Party. Every year it restrains a little more the social-and political rights of the workers, and takes their revolutionary conquests away. There is no doubt that the 'historic mission' of the Bolshevik Party is emptied of all meaning and that it will attempt to bring the Russian Revolution to its final objective : State Capitalism of the enslaving salariat, that is to say, of the reinforced power of the exploiters and at the increasing misery of the exploited. In speaking of the Bolshevik Party as part of the socialist intelligentsia, exercising its power over the working masses of town and country, we have in view its central directing nucleus which, by its origins, its formation, and its life-

style has nothing in common with the working class, and despite that, rules all the details of life of the Party and of the people. That nucleus will attempt to stay above the proletariat, who have nothing to expect from it. The possibilities for rank and file Party militants, including the Communist youth, appear different. This mass has passively participated in the negative and counter-revolutionary policies of the Party, but having come from the working-class, it is capable of becoming aware of the authentic October of the workers and peasants and of coming towards it. We do not doubt that from this mass will come many fighters for the workers' October. Let us hope that they rapidly assimilate the Anarchist character of this October, and that they come to its aid. On our side, let us indicate this character as much as possible, and help the masses to reconquer and conserve the great revolutionary achievements.

## **REVIEW OF :**

# **HISTORY OF THE MAKHNOVIST MOVEMENT**

**BY PETER ARSHINOV.**

**REVIEW BY CONOR MCLOUGHLIN**

(Freedom Press)

THE TREATY OF Brest-Litovsk concluded by the Bolsheviks in March 1918, which saw Russia get out of the bloodbath of World War 1, handed most of the Ukraine over to the German and Austro-Hungarian empires. Needless to say, the inhabitants were not consulted. Neither were they too pleased. Various insurgent movements arose and gradually consolidated. The Revolutionary Insurgent Army of the Ukraine led by Nester Makhno, an anarchist-communist from the village of Gulyai Polye, quickly won the support of the South for its daring attacks on the Austro-Hungarian puppet, Hetman Skoropadsky and the Nationalist Petliurists. This book is an extremely valuable eye-witness account from Peter Arshinov - one of the main participants and editor of their paper Put'k Svobode (The Road to Freedom). Arshinov and Makhno were later to draw up the Platform of the Libertarian Communists in during their Paris exile in 1926 (see Workers Solidarity 34).

It may seem strange that the Revolutionary Insurgent Army of the Ukraine (its proper title) is constantly referred to as the "Makhnovists". Anarchists are the last people to engage in blind hero-worship. At its height it had 30,000 volunteer combatants under arms. While all were inspired by anarchist ideas, only a small minority had worked-out anarchist views. Through the army's cultural-educational section political discussion and learning was encouraged but the majority of combatants and supporters continued to call themselves "Makhnovists" and to this day the name has stuck.

#### ENEMIES ON ALL SIDES

Arshinov's book mainly consists of a blow-by-blow account of the movement along with some consideration of nationalism and anti-semitism, and short biographies of some of the main Makhnovists. It's an easy non-academic read. However the book is an almost exclusively military account of the movement. Arshinov makes no apologies for this. Of necessity the Makhnovists spent most of their time in military engagements. Over the three years 1918-1921 they had to fight the forces of the Hetman, White Generals Denikin and Wrangel, nationalists like Petliura and Grigor'ev and, of course, the Bolsheviks.

Makhno and his commanders won against odds of 30:1 and more on occasion. One example was on September 25th 1919 at the

village of Peregonovka when the Makhnovists after retreating 400 miles found themselves surrounded by Denikin's army. They succeeded in turning Denikin flank with a tiny force of cavalry and in the ensuing panic Denikin's army were routed. This action probably saved Petrograd from the Whites and was one of the most massive defeats inflicted on them.

Of course Makhno's military skill, his use of cavalry and mounted infantry to cover huge distances, isn't directly of relevance to us. What is of interest is how the Makhnovists could fight and win as a revolutionary army with deep roots among the Ukrainian peasants and workers. The insurgent army was an entirely democratic military formation. It's recruits were volunteers drawn from peasants and workers. It elected it's officers and codes of discipline were worked out democratically. Officers could be, and were, recalled by their troops if they acted undemocratically.

Wherever they appeared they were welcomed by the local population who supplied food and lodging as well as information about about enemy forces. The Bolsheviks and Whites were forced to rely on massive campaigns of terror against the peasantry, with thousands being killed and imprisoned.

The speed at which areas changed hands in the Ukraine made it virtually impossible for them to do engage in widescale constructive

activity to further the social revolution. "It seemed as though a giant grate composed of bayonets shuttled back and forth across the region , from North to South and back again, wiping out all traces of creative social construction". This excellent metaphor of Arshinov's sums up the difficulty. However, unlike the Bolsheviks, the Makhnovists did not use the war as an excuse for generalised repression and counter-revolution. On the contrary they used every opportunity to drive the revolution forward.

### THE SOCIAL REVOLUTION

The Makhnovist movement was almost exclusively poor peasant in origin. The very existence of a revolutionary peasant movement made a mockery of Trotsky's and Lenin's conception of the peasants as automatically reactionary. Peasants who made up the vast majority of the USSR's population were seen as a brutalised and unthinking mass who could not organise collectively. When not faced with bayonets and forced requisitions they related naturally towards the workers in the towns and cities. The Makhnovists provided a unifying force encouraging and protecting peasant expropriations of landlords and large farmers (kulaks). They spread the idea of voluntary collectives and tried to make links with urban workers. Their motto was "worker give us your hand".

Around Gulyai-Polye several communes sprang up. These include the originally named communes 1,2 and 3, as well as the "Rosa Luxembourg" commune with 300 members. Several regional congresses of peasants and workers were organised. A general statute supporting the creation of 'free soviets' (elected councils of workers', soldiers' and peasants' delegates) was passed though little could be done towards it's implementation in much of the Ukraine because of the constantly changing battlefield.

The Makhnovists held the cities of Ekaterinoslav and Aleksandrovsk for a few months after their September 1919 defeat of Denikin. In both cities full political rights, freedom of association and press freedom were established. In Ekaterinoslav five political papers appeared, including a Bolshevik one. Several conferences of workers and peasants were held in Aleksandrovsk. Though workers liked the idea of running their own factories, the nearness of the front and the newness of the idea made them cautious. The railway workers did set up a committee which began investigating new systems of movement and payment but, again, military difficulties prevented further advances. Ekaterinoslav, for example, was under constant bombardment from the Whites just across the river.

Arshinov attacks the Russian anarchists for almost totally ignoring the Makhnovists. The Bolsheviks saw them as important enough to send in 15,000 troops in 1921 to wipe them out. Too many of the anarchists "slept through" events. It is absolutely vital that this be acknowledged and learnt from. The only significant number of anarchists to participate as a group were those of the Nabat (Alarm) Confederation. These included the famous Russian anarchist

Voline who wrote the preface for this book. They worked mainly in the cultural-educational section, though some fought in the army. Unfortunately, more than few anarchists were content to remain in ivory towers of theoretical abstraction. Their sole contribution was to whine about the military nature of the movement. As we have seen the Makhnovists had no choice in this regard. They constantly acknowledged that they were weak on theory, mainly due to lack of education. It was essential for all who called themselves anarchists to get stuck in. It is a sad reflection on the political and organisational weaknesses of Russian anarchism that they failed to do so. Though they were in a minority, well organised intervention in groups like Makhno's might have had an important influence on the course of events in the revolution. Arshinov rightly accuses them of total disorganisation and irresponsibility leading to "impoverished ideas and futile practice".



## A NEW SET OF CHAINS

Above all this book is a tragic indictment of Bolshevik leadership and mis-rule. The Bolsheviks clung to the theory that the masses couldn't handle socialism. Workers and peasants proved them wrong by continually throwing up their own organs of democratic economic control. If the facts didn't fit the theory then the facts had to be disposed off. Once again impoverished theory led to impoverished practice.

Arshinov documents the re-emergence of minority class rule. He describes the Bolshevik nationalisation of production as with uncanny accuracy as "a new kind of production relations in which economic dependence of the working class is concentrated in a single fist, the State. In essence this in no way improves the situation of the working class".

The Bolsheviks did realise the political significance of the Makhnovists. Any autonomous movement posing the idea of direct economic control and management by workers and peasants was a political threat. From 1917 onwards the Bolsheviks responded to such threats in one way, physical annihilation.

This book explodes the long list of falsehoods and myths about the Makhnovists. It serves as further evidence (is any more needed!?) of the authoritarian role of the Bolsheviks in the

Russian revolution. Most of all, it serves as an inspiration to all serious class struggle anarchists. It poses clearly the need for anarchists to organise and win the battle of ideas in the working class.

This is how we can finally begin to fight to make anarchism a reality.

Conor McLoughlin